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EXCISE

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What course of action should we follow if construction on missile sites continues?

1. Alternatives. The alternatives are clear enough: do nothing; to impose a total blockade of Cuba; to attack sites built subsequent to the President's speech; to attack all missile sites; to invade and occupy the island.

2. The major considerations bearing on the choice appear to be ~~five~~ ^{four}.

a. What the initial Soviet response is to the President's speech and to our initial course of action. It is not yet clear whether the primary Soviet purpose is to damage the foundations of the Alliance before making a thrust against Berlin or some other area (e.g., Turkey or Iran); whether their action in Cuba is preliminary to pressure on us to negotiate a weakening in our base structure; or whether it is, simply, a serious military move in which they intend to persist, come what may.

b. What the initial reaction of the principal members of the Alliance will be to the President's speech

and our initial course of action. We do not know whether

they will

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they will rally fully to us; whether they will exert maximum pressure on us to limit our actions against Cuba; or whether they will, in fact, prefer to have us kill rather than wound the beast.]

c. We do not know precisely the military significance of what is now on the island; notably, how much material has been landed, and whether nuclear warheads are already there.

d. It is impossible to assess at the present time what the reaction of our own people will be [and whether there will be an irresistible pressure to clean out the island.]

3. In the light of the ambiguity which overhangs these five critical considerations, we cannot make a specific recommendation; and it may be that as of this morning the Secretary should reserve his position.

4. On the other hand, the President has said: "Our unswerving objective, therefore, must be to prevent the use of these missiles against this or any other country; and to secure their withdrawal or elimination from the Western Hemisphere." ... "Should these offensive military preparations

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continue thus increasing the threat to the hemisphere, further action will be justified." Our purpose is clear; but the nature and timing of our action to this end cannot be predetermined at this time.

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